

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB PINT TD

SUBJECT: ON EVE OF CARNIVAL, SUGAR SPAWN TRINIDAD'S MOST ACTIVE
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUE

REF: A. POS 349; B. POS 463

SUMMARY. MILITANT LABOR LEADERS CLAIM THEY WILL LEAD 20,000 SUGAR WORKERS AND FARMERS INTO PORT OF SPAIN AND SAN FERNANDO DURING CARNIVAL, BUT TRANSPORT PROBLEMS FOR THE WORKERS AND POLICE VIGILANCE ARE EXPECTED TO MINIMIZE CHANCE OF DISTURBANCES.

SHOW OF SOLIDARITY OF "PROGRESSIVE UNIONS" WITH SUGAR WORKERS COULD DEVELOP INTO A NEW ALLIANCE OF MILITANT AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS. END SUMMARY.

1. MILITANT LABOR LEADERS RAFFIQUE SHAH AND BASDEO PANDAY HAVE CLAIMED THEY WILL LEAD 20,000 SUGAR WORKERS AND FARMERS INTO SAN FERNANDO AND PORT OF SPAIN DURING CARNIVAL CELEBRATIONS FEB 25/26. ON THOSE DAYS THE STREETS WILL BE FILLED WITH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF REVELLERS. A SIZEABLE NUMBER OF SUGAR WORKERS IN CITIES COULD RESULT IN NASTY CONFRONTATIONS AND VIOLENCE.

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2. IN AN EFFORT TO DIMINISH SUPPORT FOR SHAH AND PANDAY, MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE MAHABIR FEBRUARY 17 ANNOUNCED AN INCREASE IN PRICE TO CANE FARMERS AND MADE PUBLIC PLANS TO CONVERT SOME SUGAR LAND TO FOOD CROPS, THUS PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES TO SUGAR WORKERS FOR YEAR AROUND EMPLOYMENT (REF B). INSTEAD OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT SATISFYING THE WORKER, HOWEVER, THE CROWDS HAVE INCREASED DURING THE WEEK. ON FEBRUARY 19 SEVERAL THOUSAND CANE FARMERS DEMONSTRATED CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR SHAH IN SAN FERNANDO AND ON FEBRUARY 21 LEADERS OF THE MILITANT COUNCIL OF PROGRESSIVE TRADE UNIONS INCLUDING OILFIELD WORKERS TRADE UNION PRESIDENT GEORGE WEEKES AND TRANSPORT AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS UNION PRESIDENT JOE YOUNG SHARED THE PLATFORM WITH SHAH AND PANDAY DURING A PUBLIC MEETING HELD IN DOWNTOWN PORT OF SPAIN.

3. IN RELATED EVENTS THE EXECUTIVE OF THE ALL TRINIDAD SUGAR ESTATES AND FACTORIES WORKERS TRADE UNION (ALL TRINIDAD) AND THE TRINIDAD ISLAND WIDE CANE FARMERS ASSOCIATION (TICFA) HAVE OBTAINED INJUNCTIONS AGAINST THE INSURGENTS OCCUPYING THEIR OFFICES (POS 318). ALL TRINIDAD'S OFFICES HAVE BEEN VACATED BUT SHAH'S PEOPLE STILL OCCUPY TICFA'S HEADQUARTERS.

4. COMMENT: GOTT HAS LET THE CONFLICT IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY RIPEN IN THE HOPE OF RECEIVING A MANDATE FOR A BASIC REDIRECTION OF AGRICULTURE AWAY FROM DEPENDENCE ON SUGAR. THE CHOICE OF MAHABIR, AN EAST INDIAN FROM THE SUGAR AREA, TO ANNOUNCE THE NEW AGRICULTURAL POLICY RATHER THAN THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE UNDERLINES THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL NATURE OF THE DECISION. THE GOTT MAY HAVE WAITED TOO LONG, HOWEVER, TO AVOID SUCCESSFUL POLITICIZATION OF CANE WORKERS AND FARMERS GREIVANCES BY RADICAL LEADERSHIP. WHILE POLICE WILL BE ABLE TO STOP ANY LARGE NUMBER OF SUGAR WORKERS FROM DISRUPTING CARNIVAL IN PORT OF SPAIN AND TO A LESSER EXTENT IN SAN FERNANDO, AND IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT TRANSPORTATION TO PORT OF SPAIN CAN BE FOUND FOR MORE THAN A TOKEN BAND OF SUGAR WORKERS, SHAH AND PANDAY HAVE REJECTED THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFERS AND THE WORKERS ARE STILL FOLLOWING THEIR LEAD.

5. AT MINIMUM, SHAH AND PANDAY WILL HAVE CONSOLIDATED THEIR POWER DURING THE STRUGGLE AND JUSTIFIED THEIR CLAIM TO REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF SUGAR WORKERS AGAINST GOVERNMENT

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INDIFFERENCE OR HOSTILITY. THE SHOW OF SOLIDARITY OF THE SUGAR WORKERS AND THE "PROGRESSIVE UNIONS" PORTENDS A POSSIBLE NEW ALLIANCE OF MILITANT AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS THAT COULD BE MOBILIZED FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES.
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